



Screening Race in American Nontheatrical Film

ALLYSON NADIA FIELD MARSHA GORDON EDITORS



WITH A FOREWORD BY JACQUELINE NAJUMA STEWART

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Red Star/Black Star

The Early Career of Film Editor Hortense

“Tee” Beveridge, 1948–1968

WALTER FORSBERG

This story begins with trims: short strips of film, most less than a few feet long. Often destined for the trash heap, these dormant celluloid scrolls are among cinema’s most marginal of artifactual ephemera: unused orphan pieces that fail to make the final cut. This story’s trims arrived at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) in 2012 in a film can labeled “Unidentified Hortense Beveridge.” In the initial stages of archival processing, that rusty can, its label, and the trims it contained stood out as mysterious and indeterminate—the type of materials that excite NMAAHC film conservators. While their donor, the film scholar, historian, and cinéaste Pearl Bowser, had amassed a prodigiously expansive collection containing hundreds of early race films and newsreels, audiotape oral histories with progenitors of African American cinema, documentary television newsclips from the 1960s, and diasporic African cinema of the 1980s and ’90s, alongside a wealth of paper documentation, the “Unidentified Hortense Beveridge” trims would prove to be among the museum’s most unique and radical moving image collections. They contained footage of some of the most controversial progressive and communist African American figures of the mid-twentieth century, convening at the height of the McCarthy-era red scare to articulate a radical political platform in direct opposition to the superexploitation of black working-class women, triply oppressed by virtue of their race, sex, and class. Yet these

trims were merely the first among a body of other works, pieces of an “Unidentified Hortense Beveridge” puzzle.

This chapter unspools the story of these nonfiction films’ creator and collector, Hortense “Tee” Beveridge (née Sie, 1923–93), examining the early phases of her remarkable career as a pioneering African American film editor and committed community activist filmmaker. Beveridge’s biography and early filmmaking demonstrate how African American progressive and community-based nontheatrical activist films could be made despite segregation in the filmmaking industry and the anticommunist paranoia of the midcentury United States. Beveridge’s oeuvre of edited and produced films provides a link between 1930s and ’40s labor documentary and subsequent traditions of African American nonfiction filmmaking in the early civil rights era, and this chapter situates her work in the context of the under-examined realm of leftist, postwar, pre-*vérité* documentary film. As a black woman filmmaker, Beveridge’s career trajectory gives practical evidence of how the segregation of the film industry in New York was initially broken along lines of gender and race.

Methodologically Constellating Hortense Beveridge

Who was Hortense Beveridge and how might we decipher her connection to these films, beyond her name’s appearance on a film can label? Beveridge is largely absent from film scholarship, and her known filmography consists of a paltry conglomeration of credits on the Internet Movie Database (<https://www.imdb.com>). Some biographical information is available about Beveridge in *Domestic Diversity and Other Subversive Activities*, a 2009 memoir by her husband, Lowell “Pete” Beveridge.¹ This enchanting book chronicles the struggle of the couple’s midcentury interracial marriage and is an indispensable resource despite its focus on matters of marriage, life, and love rather than filmmaking. Tee Beveridge died in 1993 and cannot fill in gaps, elucidate incongruities, detail production histories, or articulate her experiences as a female African American progressive filmmaker. That many of the films in Pearl Bowser Collection cans labeled “H. Beveridge” are outtake fragments, often unfinished raw footage without credits, and of a political orientation then subject to government surveillance, means that they do not appear in educational film catalogs (often a fruitful resource in tracing histories of nontheatrical film). For these reasons, it is a challenge to splice together the details of her life and work.

Monica Dall'Asta and Jane M. Gaines's prologue to the 2015 anthology *Doing Women's Film History* positions historical objects—specifically, motion picture film prints—as momentously important “material remnants of the past,” displaced in time, which they advocate be employed to evoke necessarily incomplete “constellations” to sketch a “historical montage,” an “image of the past.”² Facing “an immeasurable void that is all that went unrecorded, an oblivion from which we painstakingly draw every piece of evidence,” the authors’ historiographic constellation approach to unwritten histories of women filmmakers uses filmic artifacts to evoke a phantasmic image of a figure whose complete picture cannot be fully reconstructed.³

Following Dall'Asta and Gaines's recuperation of early Italian cinema director Elvira Giallanella, I constellate Beveridge and the surviving prints and fragments of films she made, coproduced, and collected around the contemporaneous production and cultural atmospheres she operated in. This approach is necessarily incomplete—even phantasmic—yet it will hopefully spur further research into her career and the careers of other yet-unrecognized African American nonfiction filmmakers of the same era. Thanks to previous oral histories with Pete Beveridge conducted by Pearl Bowser in 1995 and by the Brooklyn Public Library in 2012, along with additional conversations between Pete Beveridge and myself in 2015, we know about some of the coworkers and community acquaintances with whom Tee Beveridge collaborated. The archives of the New York editing union Local 771 help situate Beveridge's career in the professional New York televisual film industry of the 1950s. These sources elucidate her importance within leftist nontheatrical filmmakers and productions of the 1950s and '60s and, more broadly, enable the location of Beveridge and her work as part of the ongoing effort to build and exhibit a national film collection of the African American experience at the Smithsonian's new museum on the National Mall, amid an expansive constellation of other women workers in black film culture.

Tee (1923–1993)

Hortense “Tee” Sie was born on October 3, 1923, in New York City's Harlem neighborhood and grew up across several boroughs in households where her mother, Rachel, was employed as a domestic worker.⁴ Rachel Sie was part of the first Great Migration, moving to New York from Virginia and her native Maryland in the early 1920s.⁵ In 1924, Rachel Sie (née Hall) married Liberian-born Thorgues Sie, twenty-two years her senior, who had come



FIGURE 5.1. Hortense Sie (holding headset to ear) at the 1949 International Union of Students Congress. Courtesy of Lowell P. Beveridge.

to Baltimore in his thirties to study at what is now Morgan State University. Together, they had two children—Beveridge and her younger brother, Thorgues Jr., born in 1942—but their relationship dissipated when Thorgues returned to Liberia in 1947. Beveridge attended Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn's Flatbush neighborhood, and later George Washington Irving High School in Manhattan—both among the best public schools in the city.⁶ Beveridge was then admitted to Hunter College around 1947 and majored in social work. While Beveridge's relationship with her often-absent father was "ambivalent," Thorgues Sie seems to have planted some seed of political activism in Beveridge through his instillation of appreciation for the family's African heritage.⁷ Pete Beveridge recalls that thanks to Thorgues, as one of a small number of Liberians living in New York in the 1920s and '30s, the Sie household occasionally served as a meeting place for Liberian expatriates and other students from Africa studying in the U.S.—among them the future founder of the Ghanaian state, Kwame Nkrumah.

At Hunter College, Beveridge became involved in leftist political and student social justice organizations, including the Communist Party and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Her involvements were significant enough to earn her mention in the City College of New York student newspaper as a progressive leader, and she

attended the congress of the International Union of Students (IUS) in Sofia, Bulgaria, in September 1949 as the executive secretary for the Committee for International Student Cooperation—a student-based distributor for IUS information, believed by the House Un-American Activities Committee to be a communist front.⁸ Beveridge spent the fall of 1949 in Europe, visiting Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Soviet Union, before returning to school and her job at the communist Worker's Book Store, located at 35 East Twelfth Street in Manhattan's bookseller's row district.⁹ Beveridge's job at the bookstore brought her into contact with a wide spectrum of progressive-minded customers—a group, Pete Beveridge explains, that appealed to her: "At college Tee was attracted to the Communist Party, the only political organization at that time which recognized and campaigned against the triple exploitation of black working class women. In the college cafeteria each special interest group had its own table and the CP table was the only one where black and white students sat together. Tee liked that. She joined the party and became active in the Labor Youth League and other radical student political organizations."¹⁰

Cinematic Agitation, Training, and the Committee for the Negro in the Arts

Some undocumented experience during Beveridge's 1949 European trip appears to have inspired her to explore filmmaking as a way of channeling her political activism. According to Pete Beveridge, "When she came back to New York, that's when she started developing her interest in film, and became involved with the CNA. They made it possible for her to get into school, and to get her first job in the business."¹¹ Founded in 1947, the Committee for the Negro in the Arts (CNA) aimed "for full participation of the Negro people in the cultural life of the United States."¹² Painter and former CNA chairman Ernest Crichlow recalls the organization endeavoring "to do something about our image and get Negroes jobs in the various fields," and the CNA was one of several professional associations organized by African American talent and liberal whites to create professional opportunities for aspiring African Americans looking to work in the moving image and performing arts.¹³ Prominent CNA sponsors like Harry Belafonte, Aaron Copeland, Jacob Lawrence, Canada Lee, Dorothy Parker, Sidney Poitier, and Paul Robeson abetted mentorship for participants through their personal and professional connections.¹⁴ Two critical outcomes of Beveridge's involvement as a mentee through the CNA were her formalized film education and her acquaintance

with fellow female film editors like Peggy Lawson (with whom she would go on to collaborate over the course of many years) and other leftist documentarians of the pre–World War II era.¹⁵

Beveridge's film training sponsorship by CNA members Lawson and her partner Leo Hurwitz provides critical evidence of a link between 1930s and '40s labor documentary traditions and subsequent practices of African American nonfiction filmmaking in the early civil rights era. Beginning in 1946, Hurwitz taught filmmaking at the New Institute for Film and Television (NIFT) in Brooklyn along with other labor documentarians like Sidney Meyers, Irving Lerner, and Paul Strand.¹⁶ The *Brooklyn Eagle* described NIFT as a "new cinematic arts school at 29 Flatbush Ave."¹⁷ Promoted as a GI-bill-qualifying educational program, by 1949 NIFT had 160 students and was about to expand its nighttime curriculum offerings to the daytime hours.¹⁸ Photos from the *Brooklyn Eagle* show that NIFT was a racially integrated organization, and African American filmmaker William Greaves took courses at NIFT in 1950 before moving to Montreal to work in documentary production at the National Film Board of Canada.¹⁹ Heavily redacted FBI reports indicate that NIFT and its president Donald Winclair were surveilled due to the political ties of several NIFT faculty members.²⁰

With CNA support, according to Pete Beveridge, Tee Beveridge attended two semesters of night school film classes at New York University around 1951, yet two film fragments in the Pearl Bowser Collection suggest that Beveridge either also attended NIFT or received 16mm NIFT editing practice films directly from Hurwitz or Lawson.²¹ The first fragment is a filmstrip labeled "Editing Exercises," and the second is a spool labeled "Moxon's Master." The two black-and-white films are silent and somewhat mundane. The presence of a clock in the frame and multiple splices suggest that students may have been given a reel of stock footage and assigned to edit the footage in order to visually tell a diegetic story. Both bear handwritten print-through labeling on laboratory leader that reads "New Institute for Films."

Beveridge's training and personal connections to Hurwitz, Lawson, and Strand through NIFT situate her in the often-obfuscated post–World War II, pre-vérité documentary filmmaking field. In his ambitious polemic "Carl Marzani and Union Films: Making Left-Wing Documentaries during the Cold War, 1946–53," Charles Musser examines this era of leftist documentary. Using Marzani and Union Films as its exemplars, he interrogates the historical realities of an active ecosystem of postwar, pre-vérité documentary that runs counter to prevailing documentary film scholarship.²² Musser states that Union Films productions "continued to be marginalized because

they did not easily fit within a documentary teleology that culminated in the achievement of *cinéma vérité* in the 1960s.”²³ He convincingly demonstrates that left-wing political documentary did not terminate with Leo Hurwitz and Paul Strand’s *Native Land* (1942) or Hurwitz’s own *Strange Victory* (1948), but instead flourished through the 1950s.

Given Beveridge’s personal ties to many of the same filmmakers, echoing Musser, I frame Beveridge’s filmic output between 1949 and the 1960s as yet another important oeuvre of postwar documentary filmmaking history overlooked by film historians. The imbrication of Beveridge in this milieu of postwar left-wing political documentary filmmaking by figures like Hurwitz and Marzani is further evidenced by the presence of three Union Films–produced Progressive Party campaign film prints included in the Pearl Bowser Collection that were likely originally collected and used by Beveridge: *A People’s Convention* (1948) and two titles for which Musser was unable to locate surviving copies at the time of the publication of his article, *The Case of the Fishermen* (1947) and *Count Us In* (1948).²⁴ Beveridge’s film work demonstrates that, as Musser concludes regarding postwar documentary, “the left did not self-destruct but . . . generated significant quantities of accomplished documentary work.”²⁵

Unlike Marzani, however, part of Beveridge’s significance lies in the rarity of her position as an African American female filmmaker during a period for which scholarship has uncovered so few others. Documentarian William Alexander, mentored by Mary McLeod Bethune at the National Youth Administration agency prior to American involvement in World War II, is one exceptional example of an African American who also made socially conscious documentary films in this era.²⁶ However, working for the federal government’s Office of War Information to create propaganda films—most notably the *All-American News* newsreels, circa 1944–45, which aimed to positively depict African Americans and their roles in supporting the war effort—Alexander’s contributions were less politically leftist or subversive than Beveridge’s. The conclusions of the 1967 National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (known as the Kerner Commission) would directly inspire broader opportunities for African Americans already working in non-fiction film—figures like Beveridge’s fellow NIFT alumnus William Greaves, who expatriated to Canada for a decade to make documentaries during the 1950s.²⁷ However, at the time of Beveridge’s first forays into filmmaking, the Kerner Commission–inspired opportunities to spur black documentary television production such as WNET’s *Black Journal* and ABC’s *Like It Is* were still over a decade away for filmmakers such as Gil Noble, Charles Hobson,

St. Clair Bourne, Kent Garrett, Tony Brown, Stan Lathan, and Madeline Anderson. In this context, Beveridge can be seen as a progenerating figure in a new line of documentary—progressive and socially conscious nonfiction films created by African Americans.

The Council on African Affairs and *South Africa Uncensored* (1952)

Beveridge's political activism in the late 1940s led her to join the Council on African Affairs (CAA)—an outgrowth of the International Committee on African Affairs, cofounded in 1937 by Max Yergan and Paul Robeson—where she merged her political activities with her nascent filmmaking skills. Robeson served as the CAA's chairman for the majority of its eighteen-year existence, and it was, according to Robeson biographer Martin Duberman, "the one organizational interest among many with which he was identified that was closest to his heart."²⁸ Major progressive figures of the black left were dedicated CAA proponents during its existence, including W. E. B. Du Bois, Eslanda Robeson, Charlotta Bass, Louise Thompson Patterson, and W. Alphaeus Hunton. The CAA, or simply "the Council," was "a unique voice calling for decolonization of Africa and, in particular, solidarity with the anti-apartheid movement."²⁹ Its initial purpose was as an informational clearinghouse for "accurate information so that the American people might play their proper part in the struggle for African Freedom."³⁰ In 1943, W. Alphaeus Hunton left his position in the English Department at Howard University in Washington, DC, to join the Council as its educational director.³¹ Hunton transformed the Council in the next decade from an information provider to a mass organization, until it was charged with subversion under the McCarran Act in 1953 and disbanded in 1955.

The Council provided Beveridge with the opportunity to edit her first known complete film, *South Africa Uncensored*, a twenty-two-minute polemic against apartheid that was distributed by the Council and finished sometime in 1951. The film was used at events for several years, and on at least one occasion it accompanied a speech by Eslanda Robeson.³² Production of the film by the Council is not mentioned in Hunton's personal papers, or in the Council's surviving financial records; however, a CIA internal memorandum from 1954, seeking to procure a copy of the film for surveillance purposes, cites the Council as the film's distributor.³³ The only known extant copy of the film was preserved in 2016 by film conservators at NMAAHC.

South Africa Uncensored is a raw and gritty piece of black-and-white agitprop, full of firsthand testimonial footage of the appalling conditions

~~SECRET~~

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

(b) (1)

(b) (3)

RECEIVED FROM
JUN 16 1954
CIA SIP

JUN 15 1954

APPROVED FOR
RELEASE DATE:
02-04-2010

TO: Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Attention: Mr. S.J. Papich

FROM: Deputy Director, Plans *24H*

SUBJECT: "Salt of the Earth"
"South Africa Uncensored"

1. This Agency is interested in procuring two motion pictures controlled by Communist groups, titles as above, in either 16mm or 35mm width. Up to \$500 is available to reimburse any expense of such procurement. Your attention is invited to previous correspondence on the former film, captioned "Independent Productions Corporation, Internal Security - C, Registration Act", your file number 100-399257.

2. *X* "Salt of the Earth" was sponsored by the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers and was advertised to be shown at the 86th Street Grande Theater, 160 East 86th Street, New York, New York; telephone Atwater 9-7720. An advertising leaflet suggests "For information about theater parties for your union, church, social club, etc., call Plaza 7-7643". It is a full-length feature film highlighting labor conflicts and the problem of minorities. It was produced late in 1952 or early in 1953.

3. *X* "South Africa Uncensored" is distributed by the Council on African Affairs, Inc., which has been designated pursuant to Executive Order 10450. The film is 22 minutes in length, and was produced about 1953.

4. It is requested that the FBI, if possible, either:

a. Procure for this Agency a retention copy of each film; or *EX - 107* *RECORDED-30* *100-399257-122* *9 JUN 17 1954*

b. Supply this Agency with a duplicate (copy) negative of each film; or

c. Procure a print of each film which we may have in our possession for at least 48 hours.

~~SECRET~~

Declass Per
CIA Letter 4-29-85
1/10/85

UNRECORDED COPY FILED IN

FIGURE 5.2. Central Intelligence Agency solicitation authorization for film copy of *South Africa Uncensored* pursuant to Executive Order 10450.

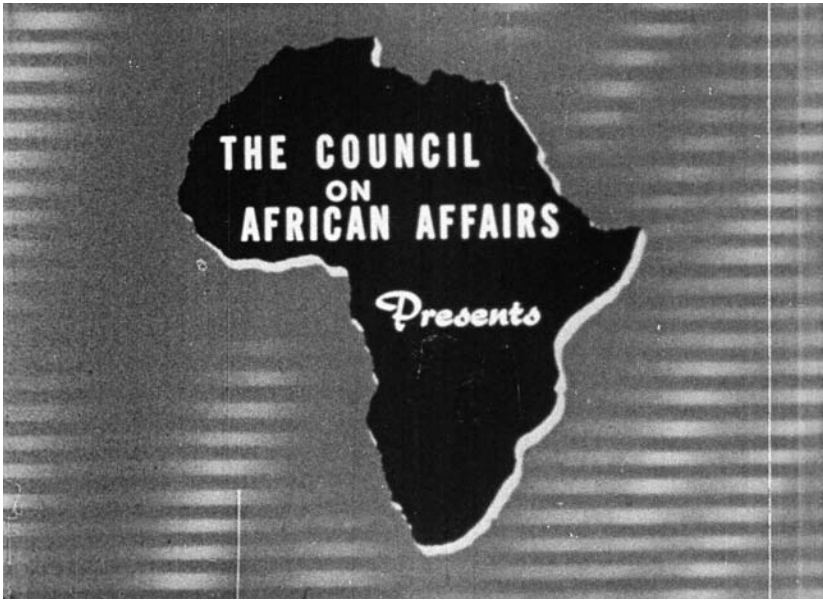


FIGURE 5.3. Frame enlargement from *South Africa Uncensored*. Collection of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, gift of Pearl Bowser. Object ID# 2012.79.1.4.1a. Courtesy of the Estate of Hortense Tee Beveridge.

endured by black South Africans under apartheid. The film portrays the filth in black shantytowns lacking proper sewage systems, the country's segregated public spaces, and the vile white leisure spectacle of enjoying forced fisticuffs between black workers. Pete Beveridge recalls the film as "a putting together of news clips and films that have been smuggled out of South Africa."³⁴ The film's visual aesthetics reflect the source footage's clandestine and illicit provenance; much of the footage is high contrast and has a duplicated and generationally depreciated quality, occasionally out of register and causing a frame line to appear on-screen. The film's ending juxtaposes images of discrimination and police violence in Harlem as a rhetorical mirror for its intended U.S. audience. *South Africa Uncensored* lacks on-screen credits but is clearly narrated by Council chairman Robeson, whose elocution lends a reasoned gravitas to its message. In parallel with Musser's claims regarding Union Films' 1948 Henry Wallace presidential campaign films, *South Africa Uncensored* reveals Robeson's "continuation of his film career by other means and for different purposes," abetting progressive political filmmaking in a period when blacklisting embargoed his screen acting and singing career.³⁵

“Necessary Vitamins”: Beveridge’s Fragmentary
Progressive Documentary Films

If *South Africa Uncensored* played a propagandistic role in raising awareness and sparking outcry for an important leftist cause of the midcentury, it did so among the company of other kinds of nontheatrical “useful cinema” for progressive and educational causes in a very practical way.³⁶ Still a rich genre, ripe for historical inquiry, in the first seven years after 1945 it is estimated that over 25,000 nonfiction 16mm films were produced in the United States.³⁷ Like the Union Films made for Wallace, or Henri Cartier-Bresson’s *With the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in Spain* (1937) promoting antifascists during the Spanish Civil War, films like *South Africa Uncensored* were screened at lectures, gatherings, and parties to raise money for the cause. (It was at one such gathering in Harlem—a fund-raising party sponsored by the Council, held at Beveridge’s apartment at 69 East 125th Street in December 1952, and with Robeson in attendance—where Pete and Tee Beveridge first met.)³⁸ The Wallace campaign film catalog-pamphlet, *Films for ’48: A Guide to Progressive Films and Their Use*, conceives of such films as “necessary vitamins to discussions at union and political meetings,” capable of “plumping” attendance and intensifying the effectiveness of messages.³⁹

Considering *South Africa Uncensored* and other film footage in Beveridge’s archives as necessary vitamins to animate and illustrate political discussion and social justice provides insight into how some of these films were likely screened as illustrative tools within the broader agenda of a meeting or event. One example is Beveridge’s silent, 16mm, four-minute footage of an April 1949 Harlem Trade Union Council (HTUC) meeting (called [*Harlem Trade Union Council Convention, 1949*] by NMAAHC), which may have been used to illustrate an accompanying speech at a subsequent union meeting.⁴⁰ The footage depicts a hall meeting and what is believed to be the election of sailor and labor organizer Ferdinand Smith to head the newly formed HTUC. Labor organizer Ewart Guinier also appears onstage at the meeting, a year before he became vice president of the National Negro Labor Council. The fact that the silent HTUC footage contains film-within-a-film footage of the seated HTUC audience watching a 16mm film projection of protestors wearing “Free Willie McGee” T-shirts supports the idea of film as necessary vitamins by demonstrating that 16mm documentary films were indeed shown at labor meetings.

Viewed through the conceptual lens of necessary vitamins, I want to refocus this chronicle of Beveridge’s political documentary films on the

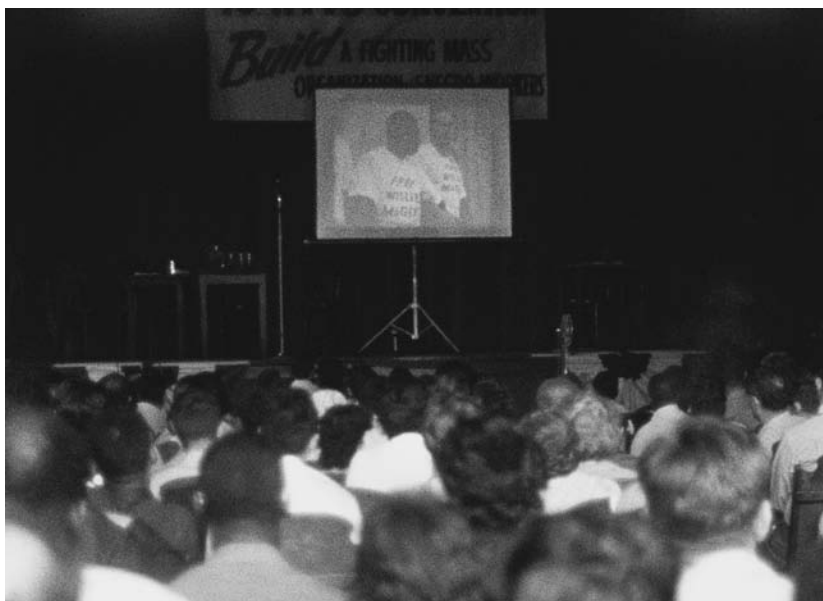


FIGURE 5.4. Frame enlargement from [*Harlem Trade Union Council, April 1949*], featuring a screening of 16mm “necessary vitamins.” Object ID# 2012.79.1.53.1a. Courtesy of the Estate of Hortense Tee Beveridge.

“Unidentified Hortense Beveridge” trims with which this chapter began. These fragments reveal a poetic resonance between their artifactual marginality as trims and the historical figures that appear in many of them. Raw footage ultimately identified as documenting the Eastern Seaboard Conference of the Sojourners for Truth and Justice, held at the Harlem YMCA on March 23, 1952, chronicles the major radical and communist African American women activists of the era, including Claudia Jones, a heroic and persecuted African American progressive who, as a leading theoretician of the midcentury Communist Party of the USA, articulated the unique “superexploitation” of black working-class women, triply oppressed by virtue of their race, sex, and class; Louise Thompson Patterson, *engagée* of the Harlem Renaissance and close associate of Langston Hughes, with whom she cofounded the Harlem Suitcase Theatre while working as a leading Marxist activist in Harlem; Ella Baker, a legendary organizer whose involvement spanned the 1930s NAACP to the 1960s Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee; and Charlotta Bass, educator, civil rights advocate, publisher of the *California Eagle* newspaper (from 1912 until 1951), and vice presidential candidate for the Progressive Party



FIGURE 5.5. Louise Thompson Patterson, Sojourner for Truth and Justice. Object ID# 2012.79.1.4.1a. Courtesy of the Estate of Hortense Tee Beveridge.

in 1952. According to historian Erik McDuffie, “no organization was more important to black feminism than the Sojourners for Truth and Justice,” which was founded in 1951 by veteran radical Louise Thompson Patterson and young thespian and poet Beulah Richardson.⁴¹ Little other moving image footage of many of these political figures exists, and the silent cinematic specters of such McCarthy-era pariahs seem illicit while simultaneously redemptive as parts of the Smithsonian’s national collections, unspooling on a film inspection bench in the shadow of the Washington Monument.

The footage focuses on a table of speakers seated onstage. Actor and organizer Paul Robeson is seated at the far left of the table. Stage left of Robeson are educator and Communist Party leader Dr. Doxey Wilkerson and his wife, Yolanda, along with CAA educational director Alphaeus Hunton, whose activist-wife Dorothy is seen as the footage’s first speaker. Activist Claudia Jones is in the foreground, seated at the far right of the onstage table, and Louise Thompson Patterson can be seen in close-up wearing a Sojourners for Truth and Justice ribbon, halfway through the footage. Charlotta Bass can be seen speaking to great applause, and the second-to-last speaker in the footage is playwright Alice Childress.

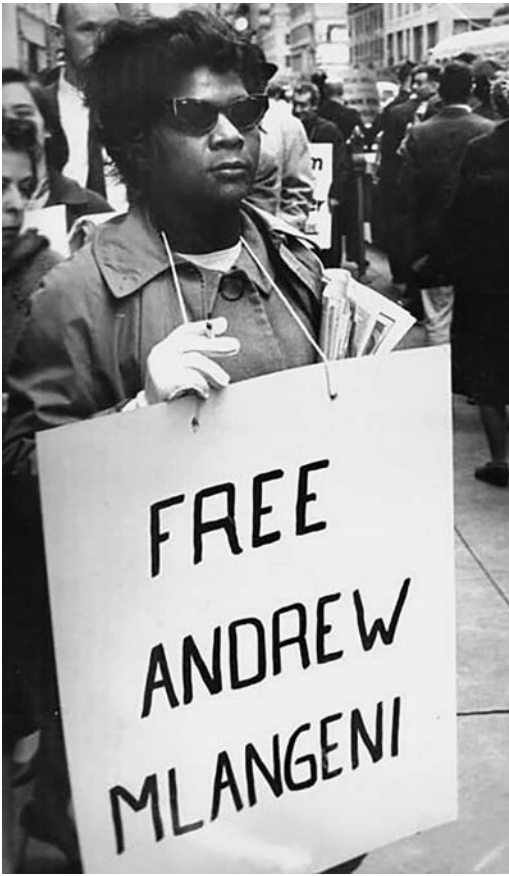


FIGURE 5.6. Tee Beveridge protesting outside South African Embassy, New York (circa 1963). Courtesy of Lowell P. Beveridge.

The Eastern Seaboard Conference in March 1952 was the group's second (and last) major gathering after its inaugural Washington, DC, convention in fall 1951, and it saw the Sojourners coalesce around their organizational tenets of speaking out about South African apartheid and of fighting against the triple oppression facing working-class black women.⁴² By the end of 1952, the group succumbed to the strict anticommunist policy espoused by the NAACP and ceased operations.⁴³ The conference's timing, its participants, and the Sojourners' activism vis-à-vis South African apartheid make it probable that the Sojourners screened the recently completed *South Africa Uncensored* at this meeting. Other footage among these trims depicts people leaving the double doors of the Lenox Avenue Club Baron—site of several CNA-sponsored plays staged by the People's Showcase Theater in 1951 and 1952—and three minutes of silent black-and-white footage of Paul Robeson

dressed as Santa Claus at a Christmas party for the American Labor Party, circa 1950–52, about which less is known.⁴⁴

Union Woman All the Way: TV Commercials by Day,
Subversive Documentary by Night in the 1950s

South Africa Uncensored is Beveridge's earliest-known film editing credit, and the film was produced early in her trade education. Archives of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) Local 771 for Motion Picture Film Editors document Beveridge's membership application to the union on November 25, 1952.⁴⁵ Over the course of the next seven years, Beveridge worked her way up through the ranks of the union, initially working for television film advertising production houses run by animators like Shamus Culhane, Dave Hilberman, and William Pomerance. On June 17, 1953, Beveridge became a full-fledged member of Local 771—the first African American woman admitted to what fellow African American female editor and eventual Local 771 member Madeline Anderson described as a “father-son union.”⁴⁶

This period marked the zenith of a villainous inquisition by the House Un-American Activities Committee and the FBI, which scrutinized the animation trade as a suspected locus for communist organizers and mind-control operatives.⁴⁷ If Beveridge's initial film training was facilitated by politically leftist filmmakers through the CNA, she came to cut her teeth as an editor in a milieu where the same kinds of people became her professional coworkers in commercial production environments. The lack of on-screen credits in television commercials afforded authorial anonymity (and, thus, paying gigs) to then-blacklisted leftist filmmakers like Hurwitz, Lawson, and John and Faith Hubley—the latter of which “had a major impact” on Beveridge as mentors, according to Pete Beveridge. Yet the lack of screen credits also makes it difficult to discern exactly which productions Beveridge worked on.⁴⁸ The surge in demand for film labor in early 1950s nontheatrical film and television likely abetted Beveridge's Local 771 membership and fueled her career opportunities; one history of the New York IATSE describes the 1950s as “the renaissance of the film industry in New York,” with high-quantity television production serving “like a massive shot of adrenaline.”⁴⁹

On January 1, 1954, Beveridge gained promotion to the union rank of assistant editor at Tempo Productions, and by December 1957 she had begun a “trial period for Editorship” at MPO Television Films, graduating to full editor in March 1958.⁵⁰ A 1957 *Billboard* advertisement for MPO lists both



FIGURE 5.7. Portrait of editor Hortense Sie (circa 1950s). Courtesy of Lowell P. Beveridge.

Beveridge—still credited with her maiden name, “Hortense Sie”—and Walter Hess among its staff, and the two would later work together on short documentaries on the making of Hollywood dramatic feature films while at the Professional Films company in the 1970s. Walter Hess corroborated to me the fact that MPO made a point of hiring leftists, blacks, and the blacklisted:

I was part of that leftist group. MPO employed a great number of what you would call leftists, as did several other companies that did similar work. Hortense and I were companions, working next to each other in the cutting room. There was only one other African American editor that I can think of at that time. . . . They were incredibly rare. Tee had a very fine reputation as an editor, especially among that group of leftists. As far as I was concerned, Tee was very reserved. She was not “Hail fellow, well met.” She was her own person, and I think the fact that she was black and a woman made her careful about what she might say or do.⁵¹

Produced for the Hamilton Watch Company, the sponsored film *Ages of Time* (1959) survives in the Pearl Bowser Collection as representative of the

commercial union work Beveridge made during daytime hours. A corporate promo in the guise of a sixteen-minute educational film on the history of timekeeping, *Ages of Time* was typical of the kinds of educational-cum-entrepreneurial work Tee edited while at MPO.

In the mid- to late 1950s, while editing corporate-sponsored films by day, Beveridge used her edit suite and her Brooklyn home as an after-hours atelier and refuge for those in need. By 1954, the Beveridges had relocated from Harlem to Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and the various brownstones they came to own over the next twenty years became “open to people who needed a meal, a place to sleep, or a meeting place.”⁵² In Brooklyn, Communist Party officials requested that they go underground to serve the party “in ways that people who were publicly identified as Communists could not.”⁵³ As they did so, their home became a regular meeting place and way station for a spectrum of New York progressives, among them students from West Africa, civil rights activists on leave from Freedom Summer, South African refugees and members of the African National Congress, and various diplomats from African missions to the United Nations. Beveridge used the comfortable salary afforded by her union editor rank (nearly \$30,000 a year by the early 1960s, according to Pete Beveridge), along with her access to professional editing facilities, to help out aspiring and emergent independent filmmakers.⁵⁴ Nigerian Francis Oladele was one such independent filmmaker that Beveridge helped by facilitating access to equipment and industry contacts, and she served on the advisory board for his Calpenny-Nigeria Films company. In addition to serving as editor for Amiri Baraka on his 1968 documentary *The New-Ark*, she also mentored St. Clair Bourne, Kathleen Collins, and John Killens at various early stages of their careers.⁵⁵

Two groups of film artifacts that survive in the Pearl Bowser Collection represent Beveridge’s underground cinematic labor from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, each providing a strong linkage to the kinds of independent African American documentary to emerge by the end of the 1960s. The first, *Hands of Inge*, is a short ten-minute black-and-white documentary about the sculptor and photographer Inge Hardison. Narrated by Ossie Davis, with Eric Dolphy playing clarinet on the soundtrack, the film was produced by African American cinematographer (and fellow IATSE member) John Fletcher and was an important personal project for Beveridge.⁵⁶ Completed around 1962, the film is most significant as a cinematic document of African American self-presentation that anticipates the arts and culture documentary segments produced for black television news programs like *Black Journal* and *Like It Is* in the late 1960s.



FIGURE 5.8. Editing *Honeybaby, Honeybaby* in Beirut (circa 1974). Courtesy of Lowell P. Beveridge.

The second group of film artifacts, called by NMAAHC [*NAACP Brooklyn Rally (May 19, 1959)*] and [*Bedford-Stuyvesant Youth in Action*], relate to Reverend Milton A. Galamison—pastor of the Siloam Baptist Church in Brooklyn’s Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood, which became a site for community organizing. Both sets of film fragments illustrate Beveridge’s instrumental role in making African American self-presentation and documentary film central to Galamison’s civil rights and community organizing efforts—the eleven-minute [*NAACP Brooklyn Rally (May 19, 1959)*] as a document of protest against police brutality and the NYPD’s murder of African American Al Garrett, and the two-hour [*Bedford-Stuyvesant Youth in Action*] footage, the result of Beveridge’s 1966–67 youth filmmaking educational workshops with the community group Bedford-Stuyvesant Youth in Action.

Conclusion

Hortense “Tee” Beveridge’s film career and oeuvre are important evidence for the field of early African American nonfiction filmmaking. Earlier black nonfiction self-presentation films certainly exist, such as the uplift films of the 1910s, amateur home movie films shot by Reverend Solomon Sir Jones in 1920s Oklahoma, and the fieldwork films of Zora Neale Hurston from the late 1920s to 1940. Yet works edited, made, and collected by Beveridge are distinguished by their imbrication in, and demonstration of, African Americans and women in professional film production. Beveridge’s parallel output of commercial nonfiction sponsored films and underground progressive political documentary work heralds the advent of a particular racially integrated exposure for African American–authored cinema. A precursor to a pantheon of politically engaged black documentarians over a decade later, Beveridge is a critical yet heretofore unexamined link to the lineage of leftist documentary practices and directors of the 1930s, and a firsthand example of racial integration of the film industry and the American workplace. Indeed, African American documentarians did not simply appear after the integrationist recommendations of the 1968 Kerner Commission’s demographic study of the state of the film and television industry.⁵⁷ Instead, figures like Beveridge, Madeline Anderson, and others working in nondirectorial cinema technician roles in the 1950s and early 1960s leveraged their perspective, influence, talent, on-the-job experience, and resources to help mentor and make the way for independent nonfiction makers of the later 1960s and ’70s. Beveridge’s oeuvre also demonstrates that important filmmaking need not always yield a produced, finished product, and that documentary fragments, raw footage, and filmic necessary vitamins held their own distinct value within the organizing efforts of broader social movements.

KNOWN FILMOGRAPHY OF HORTENSE “TEE” BEVERIDGE

Unless otherwise indicated, these titles are available from the National Museum of African American History and Culture’s Pearl Bowser Collection. All available films discussed in this chapter can also be streamed through the book’s web page at <https://www.dukeupress.edu/Features/Screening-Race>.

[Harlem Trade Union Council Convention, 1949], 4 min., 16mm
PRODUCTION: Unidentified.

Moxon’s Master and Editing Exercises (ca. 1950), 3 min., 16mm
EDITOR: Hortense Sie.

[Santa Paul Robeson] (ca. 1951), 2 min., 16mm

PRODUCTION: Unidentified.

[Sojourners for Truth and Justice, 1952] (ca. 1952), 8 min., 16mm

PRODUCTION: Unidentified.

South Africa Uncensored (1952), 22 min., 16mm

EDITOR: Hortense Sie. DISTRIBUTOR: Council on African Affairs.

Ages of Time (1959), 16 min., 16mm

PRODUCER: Victor D. Solow. DIRECTORS: Lew Jacobs, Lloyd Ritter. WRITERS: Tome McGrath, Lloyd Ritter. EDITOR: Hortense Sie. NARRATOR: Burgess Meredith.

[NAACP Brooklyn Rally (May 19, 1959)], 11 min., 16mm

PRODUCTION: Andover Productions. CAMERA: John W. Fletcher Jr.

Hands of Inge (ca. 1962), 10 min., 16mm

DIRECTOR/CAMERA: John W. Fletcher Jr. EDITOR: Hortense Beveridge. NARRATOR: Ossie Davis.

[Bedford-Stuyvesant Youth in Action] (ca. 1966), 100 min., 16mm

PRODUCTION: Bedford-Stuyvesant Youth in Action. DIRECTOR/EDITOR: Hortense Beveridge.

"BULLITT": *Steve McQueen's Commitment to Reality* (1968), 10 min., 16mm

PRODUCTION: Professional Films. DIRECTOR: Ronald Saland. WRITER: Jay Anson. EDITORS: Howard Kuperman, Hortense Beveridge.

Jeanette Rankin Brigade (1968), 8 min., 16mm

PRODUCTION: The Newsreel. DIRECTORS/EDITORS: Hortense Beveridge, Ellen Hirst, Pat Johnson, Peggy Lawson, Karen Mitnick, Lynn Phillips, Gene Searchinger. ACCESS: Third World Newsreel.

The Moviemakers (1968), 7 min., 16mm

PRODUCTION: Unidentified. NOTE: A short documentary featurette on the making of *The Green Berets*.

The New-Ark (1968), 25 min., 16mm

DIRECTOR/WRITER: LeRoi Jones. ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR: Larry Neal. DIRECTOR OF CAMERA: James E. Hinton. SOUND: Edward Spriggs. EDITOR: Hortense Beveridge. ACCESS: James E. Hinton Collection, Harvard Film Archive.

Vienna: The Years Remembered (1968), 9 min., 16mm

PRODUCTION: Professional Films for Metro-Goldwyn Mayer. WRITER: Jay Anson. CAMERA: Vincent Corcoran. EDITOR: Hortense Beveridge.

The World Premiere of "Finian's Rainbow" (1968), 26 min., 16mm

PRODUCTION: Professional Films. EDITOR: Hortense Beveridge.

On Location with "The Owl and the Pussycat" (1970), 6 min., 16mm

PRODUCTION: Professional Films for Columbia Pictures. PRODUCERS/DIRECTORS: Elliot Geisinger, Ronald Saland. WRITER: Jay Anson. CAMERA: Marcel Broekman. EDITOR: Hortense Beveridge.

The Legend of Nigger Charley (1972), 98 min., 35mm

PRODUCER: Larry Spangler. DIRECTOR: Martin Goldman. CAMERA: Peter Eco. EDITOR: Howard Kuperman. ASSISTANT EDITOR: Hortense Beveridge.

Martin Scorsese: Back on the Block (1973), 7 min., 16mm

PRODUCTION: Robbins Nest Productions/Professional Films. PRODUCER: Ronald Saland. DIRECTOR: Elliot Geisinger. WRITER: Jay Anson. CAMERA: Marcel Broekman. EDITOR: Hortense Beveridge. TITLES AND OPTICALS: Cinopticals, Inc.

Honeybaby, Honeybaby (1974), 89 min., 35mm

DIRECTOR: Michael Schultz. EDITOR: Hortense Beveridge.

Promises to Keep (1974), 19 min., 16mm

PRODUCTION: Professional Films. PRODUCER: Ronald Saland. DIRECTOR: Elliot Geisinger. WRITER: Jay Anson. EDITOR: Hortense Beveridge.

Eastwood in Action (1976), 7 min., 16mm

PRODUCTION: Professional Films/Robbins Nest Productions. PRODUCERS/DIRECTORS: Ronald Saland, Elliot Geisinger. WRITER: Jay Anson. CAMERA: Marcel Broekman. EDITOR: Hortense Beveridge.

Redd Foxx Becomes a Movie Star (1976), 8 min., 16mm

PRODUCTION: Robbins Nest Productions/Professional Films. DIRECTOR: Elliot Geisinger. EDITOR: Hortense Beveridge.

Natural Enemies (1979), 100 min., 35mm

PRODUCER: John E. Quill. DIRECTOR/EDITOR: Jeff Kanew. ASSISTANT EDITOR: Hortense Beveridge.

Happy Birthday, Gemini (1980), 111 min., 35mm

PRODUCTION: Magno Sound, Inc. DIRECTOR: Richard Brenner. EDITOR: Stepham Fanfara. COEDITOR: Hortense Beveridge.

"Fundi": The Story of Ella Baker (1981), 63 min., 35mm

DIRECTOR/PRODUCER: Joanne Grant. EDITOR: Hortense Beveridge. ACCESS: Icarus Films.

NOTES

- 1 Lowell P. Beveridge, *Domestic Diversity and Other Subversive Activities* (Minneapolis: Mill City, 2010).
- 2 Monica Dall'Asta and Jane M. Gaines, "Past Meets Present in Feminist Film History," in *Doing Women's Film History: Reframing Cinemas, Past and Future*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Julia Knight (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 18.

- 3 Dall'Asta and Gaines, "Past Meets Present," 18, 21.
- 4 Lowell P. Beveridge, "Biographical Notes on Hortense 'Tee' Beveridge, October 3, 1923–December 8, 1993," email to author.
- 5 Beveridge, "Biographical Notes." In conversation, Lowell P. Beveridge kindly provided biographical background on Tee Beveridge's parents.
- 6 Lowell P. Beveridge, interview by Sady Sullivan, May 23, 2012, Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations project, 2011.019.032, <https://oralhistory.brooklynhistory.org/interviews/beveridge-pete-20120523/>.
- 7 Beveridge, "Biographical Notes."
- 8 *The Observer Post: An Undergraduate Newspaper of the CCNY* 6, no. 8 (November 7, 1949), 1; U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Un-American Activities, *Report on the Communist Peace Offensive: A Campaign to Disarm and Defeat the United States* (April 1, 1951; reprint, London: Forgotten Books, 2013), 78–79; J. Angus Johnson, "The United States National Student Association: Democracy, Activism, and the Idea of the Student, 1947–1978" (PhD diss., CUNY, 2009); U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Un-American Activities, *Guide to Subversive Organizations and Publications (and Appendixes): Revised and Published December 1, 1961 to Supersede Guide Published on January 2, 1957 (Including Index)* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1962), 50.
- 9 Beveridge, *Domestic Diversity and Other Subversive Activities*, 107.
- 10 Beveridge, "Biographical Notes."
- 11 Lowell P. Beveridge, oral history interview by Pearl Bowser, 1995, collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, gift of Pearl Bowser, Object ID# 2012.79.PB.AC.002.30.
- 12 Committee for the Negro in the Arts, "You've Taken My Blues and Gone . . .," undated brochure provided to author by Lowell P. Beveridge.
- 13 Ernest Crichlow (1914–2005), oral history interview, July 20, 1968, Smithsonian Archives of American Art, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-ernest-crichlow-11459>.
- 14 Letter from Committee for the Negro in the Arts to W. E. B. Du Bois, June 7, 1951, Credo, University of Massachusetts Amherst, <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/pageturn/mums312-b131-i455/#page/1/mode/1up>; Circular letter from Committee for the Negro in the Arts, June 17, 1949, Credo, University of Massachusetts Amherst, <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/pageturn/mums312-b128-i052/#page/1/mode/1up>.
- 15 Beveridge, interview by Pearl Bowser. Peggy Lawson was the daughter of John Howard Lawson (screenwriter, cultural manager of the Community Party USA, and one of the Hollywood Ten), and a collaborator and wife of leftist documentarian filmmaker Leo Hurwitz.
- 16 David Platt, "Brooklyn Has a New Film School," *Daily Worker* (New York), October 12, 1946.
- 17 *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 15, 1947, 7.
- 18 Jane Corby, "Ex-GIS Focus Camera's Eye on Boro as Nation's Film and Television Center," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 10, 1949, 27.

- 19 Corby, "Ex-GIs Focus Camera's Eye," 27; Brenna Sanchez, "Greaves, William 1926–," *Contemporary Black Biography* (Thomson Gale, 2005), Encyclopedia.com, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/education/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/greaves-william-1926>.
- 20 Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Stanley Levison, part 5 of 14," file number 100-392452, <https://vault.fbi.gov/Stamley%20Levison/Stamley%20Levison%20Part%2005%20of%20109>.
- 21 The edge codes of these films predate Pearl Bowser's film career; as such, they likely belonged to Beveridge.
- 22 Charles Musser, "Carl Marzani and Union Films: Making Left-Wing Documentaries during the Cold War, 1946–53," *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists* 9, no. 1 (spring 2009): 104–60.
- 23 Musser, "Carl Marzani and Union Films," 121.
- 24 Like some of the other film materials that this research attributes to Tee Beveridge, these titles all predate Pearl Bowser's career in film, yet were donated to Bowser by Pete Beveridge upon Tee's passing in 1993. While its screen title card irrefutably identifies it as *Count Us In*, Musser's article claims that this film was also known by the titles *Young People's Convention* and *The Young People Meet*.
- 25 Musser, "Carl Marzani and Union Films," 150.
- 26 Spencer Moon, *Reel Black Talk: A Sourcebook of 50 American Filmmakers* (London: Greenwood, 1997), 3.
- 27 Gil Noble, *Black Is the Color of My T V Tube* (Seacaucus, NJ: Lyle Stuart, 1981), 26–27.
- 28 Martin Bauml Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 257–58.
- 29 Gerald Horne, "Looking Forward/Looking Backward: The Black Constituency for Africa Past and Present," *Black Scholar* 29, no. 1 (spring 1999): 30–33.
- 30 Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, 257.
- 31 Johanna Selles, "The Hunton Family: A Narrative of Faith through Generations," n.d., 9, Religious Education Association, accessed April 16, 2016, http://old.religioeducation.net/member/06_rea_papers/Selles_Johanna.pdf.
- 32 "Mrs. Robeson to Speak in Boston," *Afro-American*, May 5, 1951, 8; "South African Movie Listed at John Wesley," *Courier*, March 14, 1953, 7.
- 33 Deputy Director, Central Intelligence Agency, to Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, June 15, 1954, http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0005497962.pdf.
- 34 Beveridge, interview by Pearl Bowser.
- 35 Musser, "Carl Marzani and Union Films," 144–45.
- 36 Because "useful cinema" is such a wonderful term, I invoke the idea of it as a conceptual lens to view disparate works in educational, nontheatrical, and orphan realms, as set forth in Charles R. Acland and Haidee Wasson, eds., *Useful Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).
- 37 Paul A. Wagner, "What's Past Is Prologue," in *Sixty Years of 16mm Film 1923–1983* (Evanston, IL: Film Council of America, 1954), 12.
- 38 Beveridge, *Domestic Diversity and Other Subversive Activities*.

- 39 Film Division of the National Council of Arts, Sciences and Professions, *Films for '48: A Guide to Progressive Films and Their Use* (New York: National Wallace for President Committee, 1948), 3.
- 40 "Elect Smith Head of New Union Group," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 9, 1949, 22.
- 41 Erik McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 173, 160.
- 42 McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom*, 178.
- 43 McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom*, 182.
- 44 Miles M. Jefferson, "The Negro on Broadway 1951–52—Another Transparent Season," *Phylon* (1940–1956) 13, no. 3 (3rd Qtr., 1952): 199–208.
- 45 Research on Beveridge's membership in Local 771 is enormously indebted to IATSE Local 700 office manager Sandy Fong-Ging, who provided access to the member file on Hortense Sie from which the majority of the dates of employment and employer details derive.
- 46 Moon, *Reel Black Talk*, 9.
- 47 Karl F. Cohen, *Forbidden Animation: Censored Cartoons and Blacklisted Animators in America* (London: McFarland, 1997), 171.
- 48 Beveridge, interview by Pearl Bowser.
- 49 What is now termed the Motion Picture Editors Guild as a part of the national IATSE Local 700 was, at the time, known as the Editors Union and had its own New York Local 771 chapter. "About Local 52," accessed February 6, 2019, https://www.iatselocal52.org/?zone=view_page.cfm&page=About2ous.
- 50 Archival records of the IATSE Local 700 include a letter to Local 771 from MPO's Jerry Kleppel, dated March 27, 1958, stating, "This is to inform you that Hortense Sie is now receiving an Editor's salary."
- 51 Walter Hess, phone interview with the author, April 21, 2016. Information about MPO from Robert McG. Thomas Jr., "Marvin Rothenberg, 79, Dies; Director of Legendary TV Ads," *New York Times*, October 2, 1997.
- 52 Beveridge, "Biographical Notes."
- 53 Beveridge, *Domestic Diversity and Other Subversive Activities*, 276.
- 54 Beveridge, interview by Pearl Bowser.
- 55 Beveridge, interview by Pearl Bowser.
- 56 Beveridge, interview by Pearl Bowser.
- 57 The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, known as the Kerner Commission, was an eleven-member presidential commission established by Lyndon B. Johnson and chaired by Illinois governor Otto Kerner Jr. to investigate the causes of urban unrest and to provide recommendations. Otto Kerner and David Ginsburg, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: Bantam, 1968).